

UN rights experts warn new EU policy on boat rescues will cause more people to drown

17 August 2017 – The European Union’s new policy on Mediterranean Sea rescues threatens life and breaches international standards, two United Nations independent human experts today cautioned.

The EU’s proposed new action plan, including a code of conduct for organizations operating rescue boats, [threatens life and breaches international standards](#) by condemning people to face further human rights violations in Libya, said the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, and the Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer.

“The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly. This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress,” the experts added.

The code drawn up by Italy with support from the European Commission aims to stop privately-operated ships ferrying refugees to safety in Italy from waters off the Libyan coast.

It is part of a new plan to support Italy and reduce the pressure of migrant arrivals.

Earlier this week, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, also had harsh words for the proposed change, saying the code of conduct and the overall plan suggest that Italy, the European Commission and EU Member States deem the risks and reality of deaths at sea [a price worth paying](#) in order to deter migrants and refugees.

Libya has also announced a search and rescue zone beyond its territorial waters, and is restricting access to international waters by humanitarian vessels.

The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly. This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress, Mr. Morales and Mr. Melzer said.

They added that international organizations were making tremendous rescue efforts, with their vessels providing up to 40 per cent of all search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

The Special Rapporteurs also expressed concern that Brussels was trying

to move Europe's borders to Libya,” according to a press release from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

They highlighted that, under international law, migrants should be allowed to disembark at the nearest port where their lives and freedom would not be threatened, and should then receive information, care and equitable processing of their asylum claims.

“Libya simply cannot be regarded as a safe place to disembark and the EU policy is in denial of this fact,” they said. “Migrants intercepted by the Libyan coast guard will face indefinite detention in dire and inhumane conditions, at risk of death, torture or other severe human rights violations, without any judicial review.”

They warned that it was “high time” to tackle the real issue, which was the disproportionate impact on frontline countries, such as Greece and Italy, and to relocate migrants and refugees to the other 26 European countries that under the Schengen Agreement allow for unrestricted movement of people.

“States should expand their visa regimes and provide more options for refugee settlement, temporary protection, visitors, family reunification, work, resident, retirement and student visas,” they added, “in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that migrants no longer have to embark on such deadly journeys.”

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[‘Racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia are poisoning our societies’ – UN chief](#)

16 August 2017 – Urging people everywhere to speak out against hate speech and hate crimes, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today reiterated his call for tolerance, respect for the other and the importance of recognizing diversity.

“Racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia are, as I mentioned yesterday, poisoning our societies,” the Secretary-General told journalists today at a briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“It is [absolutely essential](#) for us all to stand up against them

everywhere and every time,” he added.

Addressing questions from a journalist about the situation in the US, where a weekend protest and counter-protest over the removal of a Civil War statue in Charlottesville, Virginia, sparked discussions about race, Mr. Guterres said “these demons are appearing a little bit everywhere.”

A Portuguese national, Mr. Guterres said that as a European, he is proud that Europe created the values of Enlightenment: tolerance, the respect for the other, and the importance of recognition of diversity.

“To be able to stand for these values and to... at the same time, to condemn all forms of irrationality that undermine those values is essential, at the present moment, be it in the United States or everywhere else in the world,” the head of the UN said.

[As tensions on Korean Peninsula grow, UN chief urges world to 'dial up' diplomacy](#)

16 August 2017 – Addressing the growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today said it was important “to dial down rhetoric and dial up diplomacy.”

Speaking to the press at the UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General stressed that the solution to the crisis must be political, and reiterated that his good offices – meaning the prestige and weight that his title and the UN represent to the world community – are always available.

“I will remain in close contact with all concerned parties and stand ready to assist in any way,” [said](#) Mr. Guterres.

The message echoes what Mr. Guterres said he had told yesterday's meeting of the representatives of the Six-Party Talks, who include China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States.

Earlier this month, the UN Security Council strengthened sanctions against DPRK's exports. Unanimously adopting resolution 2371 (2017), the Council imposed a full ban on the export of coal, iron and iron ore from the north-east Asian country. Previously these items could be exported for livelihood purposes, for a limited amount.

Mr. Guterres today said that consist with that resolution, “the

international community must send a clear, coherent message to the leadership of the DPRK: fully comply with international obligations, work towards reopening communication channels and support efforts to deescalate the situation.”

He noted that the resolution sends “an unambiguous message regarding the peace and security obligations” of DPRK, while also representing “an opportunity to solve this crisis through diplomatic engagement and renewed dialogue.”

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Guterres welcomed the “continued critical engagement” by Member States and supported “the call of the Republic of Korea to the DPRK to engage in credible and meaningful dialogue.” These include steps such as confidence-building measures to defuse tension and efforts to de-nuclearize the Peninsula.

The tensions related to the crisis in the region “are at levels not seen in decades,” Mr. Guterres said.

He noted that more than three million people died in the Korean War, which ravaged the Peninsula from 1950 to 1953.

“We need to heed the lessons of history – not to repeat the mistakes,” he said.

He noted also that the potential consequences of military action “are too horrific to even contemplate.”

[UN observers conclude FARC-EP arms removal process in Colombia](#)

16 August 2017 – More than 8,000 weapons and over one million burned cartridges were transported to a central warehouse in Colombia as the United Nations political mission in the country concluded the process of the laying down of individual weapons of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) combatants.

“To date, August 15, [the UN] [concluded the process](#) of extracting all the armament and scrap ammunition in the 26 camps of the FARC-EP, as well as the collected from the arms caches until now,” began Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the [UN Mission in Colombia](#) in a press statement.

“In addition to the operation that is being carried out in Pondores, extraction operations are currently underway in four areas: La Reforma, Yari, La Guajira and La Variante. The material transported in the containers

consists of 8,112 guns and almost 1,300,000 incinerated cartridges, he added.

Mr. Arnault emphasized that the extraction process included 16 aerial-ground movements and 10 terrestrial movements, which accounted for more than 50 flight hours from three UN mission helicopters and almost 11,000 kilometres travelled.

All unstable material found in the 26 camps, including anti-personnel mines, grenades, homemade explosives and gunpowder was also destroyed.

Turning to arms caches operations, he said to date there is information about 873 of which 510 arms caches have been successfully executed.

As the result of the extraction of arms caches operations, the UN Mission in the field counted, to date, 795 weapons; 293,803 ammunitions of different calibre of small arms; 22,077 kilograms of various explosives; 25,216 meters of detonating cord and slow wick; 3,957 hand grenades and 40 mm grenades; 1,846 antipersonnel mines; 27,282 starters; and 1,130 mortar rounds, of which 81 mm, 60 mm and rockets are identified.

The mission head stressed the importance of this process and what it means for the future of Colombia.

I consider this is an important figure, which shows that there has definitely been an exhaustive process of the abandonment of weapons, not only a process of abandoning individual arms, but also an exhaustive process of abandoning everything contained in the FARC-EP target teams and as President Juan Manuel Santos said, this leads the country to a new stage, underscored Mr. Arnault.

According to a unanimously adopted resolution, on 26 September the UN Verification Mission in Colombia will replace the current mission.

[Landmark UN-backed treaty on mercury takes effect](#)

16 August 2017 – A ground-breaking global convention on mercury today goes into effect, the United Nations environment wing said, protecting millions of children and infants from possible neurological and health damage.

Governments that are party to the Convention are now legally bound to take a range of measures [to protect human health and the environment](#) by addressing mercury throughout its lifecycle, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) said in a statement.

The [Minamata Convention](#) commits Governments to specific measures, which include banning new mercury mines, phasing-out existing ones, regulating artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and reducing emissions and mercury use. Since the element is indestructible, the Convention also stipulates conditions for interim storage and disposal of mercury waste.

The Convention is the first new global convention related to the environment and health in close to a decade entered force today, 90 days after the fiftieth party ratified it on 18 May. There are now 74 parties to the Convention and 128 countries have signed it.

The Minamata Convention shows that our global work to protect our planet and its people can continue to bring nations together. We did it for the Ozone layer and now we're doing it for mercury, just as we need to do it for climate change a cause that the Minamata Convention will also serve. Together, we can clean up our act," said Erik Solheim, head of UNEP.

The Convention takes its name from the most severe mercury poisoning disaster in history. In 1956, local villages suffered convulsions, psychosis, loss of consciousness and coma from eating the fish in Minamata Bay, Japan, in which industrial wastewaters had been dumped since the 1930s. Thousands of people were certified as having directly suffered from mercury poisoning, now known as Minamata disease.

According to UNEP, up to 8,900 metric tonnes of mercury are emitted each year. It can be released naturally through the weathering of mercury-containing rocks, forest fires and volcanic eruptions, but significant emissions also come from human processes, particularly coal burning and artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Mining alone exposes up to 15 million workers in 70 different countries to mercury poisoning, including child labourers.

Other man-made sources of mercury pollution include the production of chlorine and some plastics, waste incineration and use of mercury in laboratories, pharmaceuticals, preservatives, paints and jewelry.

There is no safe level of exposure to mercury nor are there cures for mercury poisoning, which at high levels causes irreversible neurological and health damage," UNEP said, particularly among unborn children and infants.

The first meeting of the parties to the Convention will be held 24 to 29 September in Geneva.